

Market-Savvy Minds Make Names for Wines

Unity? Lotusland? See Ya Later Ranch? Doesn't anybody name wine or wineries after addled *anatidae* anymore? Like in the goodle days?

Now vintners want to unite the country (at least from a wine-regional standpoint), cash in on our lotile predisposition, salute an old curmudgeon with a penchant for canines. Wine nomenclature has hit new heights since the reign of "Queenie". Uncle Ben does a postmortal 360. Ancient Bulgarian heraldry flutters nervously over the crenellations of Chateau Jonn de Trepanier. The dogs moan uneasily by the moat. The wind cries Mary.

These efforts at what is in the end mostly marketing meet with varying degrees of success, depending on what you like in your glass, beneath your puzzlesome new closure or cap, behind your grabby labels. Here's a look at a couple that arrived late last year.

Who's to say a nice, spicy Cab-Merlot can't achieve what Meech Lake couldn't?

Not the mighty minds behind Vincor International, the country's biggest producer and promoter of wines. Get set to pop the cork on Unity, made of grapes from both the big growing regions, a handsome blend of Okanagan and Niagara. Unity is Vincor's new "ultra-premium" line; its avowed purpose is to "unite the best of Canada's premier wine growing regions". Brand new, first of its kind, it's the two-year-long project of chief winemaker Rob Scapin.

You won't find these uniting wines in VQA stores; they don't qualify for VQA designation, which is tied to a single geographic area. Nevertheless, they're built to meet, and probably exceed, Canada's exacting VQA standards, which were put in place largely to get us on shelves in some of the world's other wine-producing countries.

First out of the chute were a 2001 Chardon-

nay and a Cab-Merlot of the same vintage. The Chard costs \$24.95 where you can find it, the Cabernet \$29.95. *Ultra-premium* applies as much to the prices as anything else.

Big, heavy, handsome bottles; distinctive labels. A nice, light, clean, easy-oaky Chardonnay with 13.5 percent alcohol; drinks easily but then the alcohol creeps up on the back of the tongue and leaves a little burn behind.

We liked the Cab-Merlot a bit better for its spicy fullness and cherry mellowness. Is that the Okanagan influence talking through the Niagara Cabernet? Nice. Thirty bucks is a hard hit, though.

All ours, geographically, at least, are the wines of Lotusland. You know the

term, now try the wine. New to private stores and some serious restaurants around town are four so-labelled offerings. The packaging, the branding, the name—all of it the brainchild of the man who put Blasted Church on the map with his creative touches, Vancouver's Bernie Hadley-Beauregard, who loves nothing more than a good marketing challenge.

Once upon a time there was a B.C. winery known—if not to many—as A'Very. All the while, without telling a lot of people, folks there were using organically grown grapes. Now it's out, on the bottle, along with a new name and some distinctive new labels.

These are terrific black-and-white photo montages of Vancouver places, people, things. And that handle, like it or not, has got to be a grabber. Even more dramatic is the commitment to Stelvin. That's the name for those screw-cap closures—the wave of the future. Hurray, say all of us who've ever had a "corked" bottle of wine.

So far Lotusland wines come in Pinot Grigio, two different Gewürztraminers, and a Pinot Noir. Apparently, a Merlot is on the way. The whites are all 2002, the Pinot Noir from 2001. A whopping total of 2,000 cases,



all told, were produced.

Put the Lotusland Stone's Throw Vines Gewürz at the top of the list, taste-wise: fragrant but not perfume-y, surprisingly tart with an odd but interesting bitterness in the back; curious and intriguing enough I want to see the next vintage. It's also the cheapest of the batch, at \$15.90.

The River Rock Terrace Gewürz is less successful: very shy aroma, hardly any perfume; perhaps these are the younger vines? A short finish, light and pale. There's lots of fresh rhubarb off the nose in the Pinot Grigio; it's a little sharp, a touch higher in acid than the fruit can hold for now, but again there is promise, and I'm ready to sample the next batch. Both \$16.90.

The Pinot Noir is pretty astringent on both nose and palate, the fruit ultralight, with plenty of pepper and some greenery. Is it just a matter of more time in the bottle? I think it's more a matter of more time for the vines to do their thing. We'll be watching and waiting and ready to twist the top; \$18.90 is, umm, ambitious.

Full marks and a tip of the Uncorked cap (will we rename this corner of the paper Unscrewed?) for making the commitment

to this forward-looking way of closing wine bottles, though. And where *are* those Lotusland all-organic vineyards? The label is kinda coy: "Greater Vancouver, V4X 1B1" is the only clue, but a Web site (www.lotuslandvineyards.com/) is under construction.

You can get a taste at places like Raincity Grill, West, Le Gavroche, C, Blue Water Café, Salmon House on the Hill, Cin Cin, Diva at the Met, and the Fairmont Hotel Vancouver.

Room for one more? SYL wines we discussed here some months back—standing for See Ya Later Ranch, they also benefit from super packaging and a nice little nod to B.C. history. The SYL Brut is a blend of Chardonnay and Riesling, with an intriguing burst of flavour at the tip of the tongue—is that the Riesling?—which rolls right into a good bubble, fresh and full, a touch toasty, light on fruit but elegant and quite non-French, which is just perfect for an Okanagan sparkler.

The heaven-bound haloed dog on the label always makes me smile. And the price, \$19.99, is a bonus.

So what new names do you think the marketing brains are bandying about the table even as we sit here? Will we ever see the likes of Strawberry Angel again? ■

Uncorked
JURGEN GOTHE